

The Lawfulness and the right manner of keeping Christmas and other Festivals:

1707

A
SERMON

PREACH'D

At the Parish Church of St. Dunstan in the West, upon *Christmas-Day*, 1704.

ISAIAH V. 11, 12.

Wo unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night, till Wine inflame them.

And the Harp, and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts: But they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.

By O F SPRING  ALL, D. D.
Now Lord Bishop of Exeter.

Published at the Desire of the Church-Wardens, and the rest of the Gentlemen of the Inquest of the said Parish.

L O N D O N :

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TH E Prophet had in the beginning of this Chapter shew'd under the Parable of a Vineyard, the base Ingratitude of the *Jews* towards God, and the Judgments which they might deservedly expect. " Now, " *says the Prophet*, will I sing to my well Beloved a Song of " my Beloved, touching his Vineyard. My Beloved hath a " Vineyard in a very fruitful Hill, And he fenced it, and " gathered out the Stones thereof, and planted it with the " choicest Vine, and built a Tower in the midst of it, and " also made a Wine-press therein; and he looked that it should " bring forth Grapes, and it brought forth wild Grapes. " And now O Inhabitants of Jerusalem and Men of Judah, " judge, I pray you, between me and my Vineyard; What " could have been done more to my Vineyard that I have not " done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring " forth Grapes, brought it forth wild Grapes? And now, go " to, I will tell you what I will do to my Vineyard: I will take " away the Hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up? and break " down the Wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down, and " I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned nor digged, but " there shall come up Briars and Thorns. I will also command " the Clouds that they Rain no Rain upon it. *And then follows* " *the Application*. For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is " the House of Israel, and the Men of Judah his pleasant Plants; " and he looked for Judgment, but behold Oppression; for " Righteousness, but behold a Cry.

And then after this general Charge laid against them of Ingratitude, Unfruitfulness, and notorious Wickedness, the Prophet.

phet proceeds in the remaining part of the Chapter to make it good in several Particulars, instancing especially in their Covetousness and Injustice, *ver. 8.* their Intemperance, Prophaneness and Irreligion, *ver. 11.* their affected Blindness and Ignorance in their Duty, *ver. 13.* their Wilfulness, Presumption and Impudence in sinning, *ver. 18.* their prophane scoffing at, and despising the Divine Threatnings, *ver. 19.* their confounding the Notions of good and Evil, *ver. 20.* their foolish Conceitedness of themselves, *ver. 21.* their valuing themselves upon their Strength to do Wickedness, *ver. 22.* and their notorious Bribery, injustice, and perverting of Judgment, *ver. 23.* And at the mention of most of these, the Prophet denounces severally a special *Wo* against the Persons allowing themselves in the Sins there particularly mentioned ; and at the Conclusion of all, from the Twenty fourth Verse to the end, declares the high Displeasure that God had taken against his people for these their many and great Provocations, and the terrible and severe Judgments, which he had already sent and executed upon them for the same, and was determined, if they still went on to provoke him as they had done, to continue and increase until he should have utterly destroyed them. This, is, in short, the Sum and Design of this whole Chapter.

The Words which I have chosen at present to discourse of in the Eleventh and Twelfth Verses, contain the second of those particular Charges against the Jews, which I before mention'd ; And which I called a Charge of Intemperance, Prophaneness and Irreligion ; and it is also one of those which denounces a special *Wo* against the persons that were liable to it. *Wo unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night, till Wine inflame them. And the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe ; and Wine are in the Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.* And this I call'd a Charge laid against them, not only of Intemperance and Sensuality, (tho' that be the thing that seems to be most directly charged upon them) but likewise of Prophaneness and Irreligion ; for it seems to be here intimated, that the Intemperance and Sensuality which they allow'd themselves in, was at such times as were specially design'd and appointed by God for a Religious Commemoration of his Benefits: *the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts, but they regard not the Work of*

the Lord; i. e. that Work of the God in Memory of which those Feasts were kept. It was therefore a Fault in them, and a great one too, that they regarded not the Work of the Lord, neither considered the Operation of his hands; and it was another great Fault, that they allow'd themselves too freely in Gluttony, Drunkenness and Sensuality; but that which was a great Aggravation of both these Faults was their Complication, that is, that they spent that very time in the practice of these Sins, wherein they were under a special Obligation of exercising themselves in those Duties, viz. on the Solemn feast-Days, appointed and ordained on purpose, religiously to commemorate the Blessings and Benefits they had received from God, and to return him their Hearty Thanks for the same. *The Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts*; there was Mirth and Jollity enough, and too much; but at the same time little or no Religion; there was not more too much of the former, than there was too little of the latter; for *they regarded not the Work of the Lord, neither considered they the Operation of his Hands.*

This it seems was too often the *Jews* way of keeping their Religious Feasts: in the Fasting Part, they took care not only to do, but to overdo; but in the Religious Part they did nothing at all; so far were they from spending the time of the Sacred Festival in Devout praises and Thanksgivings to God, for those Mercies and Deliverances which those Festivals were ordained to commemorate, that they had no regard to, or consideration of them at all; their only Care and Thought was to make provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof; and in that they were as careful and thoughtful as they could possibly be; *rising up early in the Morning that they might follow strong Drink, and continuing until Night, till Wine inflamed them.*

And I wish I could say that this was not also too often the Christians way of keeping their holy Feasts; sure I am, 'tis too too commonly our way of keeping them; and especially of this great Festival of all, which we at this time celebrate, in Memory of the greatest Miracle of the Divine Mercy that was ever shewn to Mankind, viz. God's sending his own Son into the World for their Redemption. On this Festival, and shall I add too, in commemoration of this Benefit?) what more customary than for Men to *rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, and to continue until Night, till Wine inflame them*; Now, if ever, we look to hear the Sound of the Harp

Harp and the Viol, of the Tabert and Pipe, this is reckon'd the proper Season for Musick, and Noise, and Merry-making; now also is Wine in our Feasts; this is the time, the time of the whole year, for good eating and Drinking: But then our thoughts are commonly so taken up, and our time so much employ'd in these things, that we have no mind to, or no leisure for any thing that is good; God is not in all our thoughts, not now, I say, when in Reason he ought to be most there; *We regard not in our Minds the Work of the Lord, neither do we consider the Operation of his Hands.*

But since the Case is so, will some perhaps be ready to say, that this festival however at first perhaps piously design'd, is now so very much abus'd, why is it not rather quite laid aside? Why should we continue the observation of a feast, which is so commonly, so customarily, nay so constantly, every Year, * (*Ann. 1644.*) an occasion of much Sin? and time was, we have been told, and you may perhaps some of you remember, when this Counsel so far prevail'd, that, this Day was by order observ'd as a Fast: (*Ann. 1645, &c.*) Time was when the Churches on this Day were generally kept shut, and the Shops were ordered to be kept open; and a sort of Inquisition was set up against even those kinds of Food, which had been most customarily in use at this Season. But what Warrant the then Reformers had for this, from the Pattern shew'd to them in the Mount, according to which they pretended to make all their Reformation, I could never yet learn.

For the Jewish Feasts (the Feast of the passover kept in memory of their Deliverance out of Egypt, that of Penticost, in memory of the overthrow of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, and of the giving the Law upon mount Sinai, and the Feast of Tabernacles, in memory of their dwelling so long in the Wilderness in Tents, and of the Wonders which God did there; these Feasts, I say) had, as is plainly intimated in the Text, been abused by some loose and dissolute persons amongst the Jews, just as ours have been; they had been made by some the Seasons, they had proved to some the occasions of much Excess and sinful Extravagance; But were they for this reason thought fit to be laid aside and abolish'd? were they for this Reason forbidden to be observed any longer?

No, perhaps you'll say, for these were of Divine Institution, and therefore could not by any Human or Ecclesiastical Authority be laid aside, as ours may be; the Celebration of

* v. Bp. Patrick in Exod. 23. 24.

which

which has been ordain'd only by Human prudence, and the Authority of the Church.

And this indeed is true, That those Festivals which were instituted by God, could not be abolished by Men; neither could any Man, how much soever they were abused, have taken upon him to abolish them, without setting up his own Wisdom against God's.

I did not therefore ask why the *Jews* themselves, i. e. why the High Priest, or the Sanhedrim, or the King for the time being, or whoever else is supposed to have had the supreme Ecclesiastical Authority in the Nation; (I did not, I say, ask, why these) did not lay aside the Celebration of those Feasts, in which there had been commonly so much Luxury Drunkenness and Intemperance, and so little Religion; but I only ask in general, why they were not laid aside and abolish'd; and laid aside, without doubt, they might have been, and abolish'd, by the same Authority by which they had been before ordain'd, i. e. by God himself: But it did not you see seem good to the Divine Wisdom to take this Method of preventing the sinful Abuse of such holy Festivals; all that God himself thought fit to do in the case, was to warn the people against this prophaning a Religious Institution, and to denounce a *W* against those that did; *W* unto them that rise up early in the Morning, that they may follow strong Drink, &c.

For he knew how insensibly we generally are of the Divine Benefits, how apt we are to let them slip out of our Minds, and how necessary it is that our Memory thereof should be frequently refresh'd; he knew how very requisite it was that some special Times, and Seasons should be appointed for this purpose, there being great danger that that good Work will never be done at all, for the doing whereof some special time is not appointed: He knew also that they were wise and religious would consider and understand the Loving-kindness of God, not only in granting the Blessing or Benefit commemorated but likewise in ordering them to rejoyce in his Goodness, and to continue the memory thereof with solemn praises and Thanksgivings; and that such as were loose and sensual, and given to Intemperance, would not have been restrain'd from their rioting and sinful Extravagances, only by abolishing such Season of publick Praise and rejoycing; but that if they had not had those, they would have taken other Occasions of fulfilling the same fleshly Lusts; so that only to
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have abolished such Festivities, would not have been a means of reforming the Wicked part of the World, That would still have been as lustful, sensual, as intemperate, both then and at other times, as it too commonly was upon the holy Festival ; for the same corrupt Heart would, at all times, and upon all occasions, have produced plentifully the same corrupt Fruits ; but to those who were piously and well disposed, it would have been indeed a great detriment and disadvantage, by the abolishment of those days to have been deprived of those blessed Opportunities which were therein afforded them, of contemplating the divine Goodness, and impressing the sense thereof strongly upon their Minds, and working themselves up to the highest degrees of Love and Gratitude to God their most bountiful Benefactor.

In a Word ; 'Tis matter of fact, that these Festivals, tho' they had been much prophane'd and abus'd by some wicked and licentious persons, were not, however, by any Command of God laid aside, or forbidden to be any longer observ'd ; and 'tis, I think, highly probable, that the Reasons above-mentioned. or such like, were the reasons why they were nevertheless continued : But however that be, since they were by the Wisdom of God thought fit to be still continu'd and observ'd, notwithstanding the ill Use that some prophane and profligate persons had made of them ; I can see no reason, why the Governors of the Christian Church may not, in a like case, reasonably follow the pattern which the Wisdom of God has set them ; and still continue the Observation of those Christian Festivals (and of this in particular) which were instituted at first with a pious design, and from the religious Observation whereof such are as piously and vertuously inclined may, and do, without doubt, receive much Spiritual Advantage, altho' there be now (as there were formerly among the *Jews*) some leud and prophane persons, who by their wicked Abuse of them, spending them in Excess and Drunkenness, and other Lusts of the Flesh, do hasten, ascertain, and much encrease their own Damnation.

For tho' it can't, indeed, be said, It is not pretended by us, that any of these festivals, or this of *Christmas* in particular, was instituted (as the *Jewish* Festivals before spoken of, were) by the special direction and Command of God ; so that it might be abolish'd by Humane Authority (which those could not be) without opposing or contradicting a positive divine In-

stitution: Yet this we may say, and this we do affirm, That the Blessing and the Benefit which we now commemorate, (*viz.* the redemption of the World by the Incarnation of the Son of God, who was manifested, as at this Time, to destroy the Works of the devil) was an infinitely greater Benefit, than the deliverance of the *Israelites* out of *Aegypt*, than the destruction of *Pharaoh* and his Host in the *Red-Sea*, or than the miraculous preservation of the *Jews* for forty Years in the Wilderness; so that if they deserved to be kept in perpetual Remembrance, by Annual Festivals, instituted in commemoration thereof, much more does this deserve to be in like manner remember'd with Joy and Thankfulness. There was good reason therefore that the Church should appoint some Day or Days in the Year, whereon this should be done; for a publick Work of Religion (as this is) must have a special Time appointed for it, or else it can't be done at all.

Now this is all that the Church does; she appoints a certain Time whereon all her Members should meet in Religious Assemblies, to sing and give praises to God for this his inestimable Benefit; and that they may be furnish'd with proper matter for Devotion and meditation, she provides prayers to be used, and appoints Portions of Scripture to be read, and Sermon to be preached, suitable to the Occasion; and that they may have Leisure, and be in better Disposition of mind for this Holy Exercise, she discharges them, for that Time, from the Works and Labours of their ordinary Callings; and, as suitable to such a Time of Rejoycing, she commends the Exercise of Charity and Hospitality; and she may, perhaps, said also to permit (but that's the most that can be said) a free and more plentiful Use of the good Creatures of God, than the Conditions and Circumstances of men could furnish them with at all other Times of the Year; but all the while she strictly enjoyns them to keep within the Bounds of Temperance and Sobriety; and whether they eat or drink, or whatever else they do, (not unbecoming an Holy Festival) to do all to the Glory of God.

Thus, I think, it appears that there was good Reason at first for the appointing this Holy Festival to be kept in such Devout and Religious manner as the Church has directed it to be kept. And if there was good Reason for its first Institution, there is, I think, the same Reason why it should continue still to be observed, and that notwithstanding some Absences that have

have crept into, and some Inconveniencies that have arisen by the Observation thereof: For what is there so good that has not been misused? Or what is there so useful that has not been attended with some Inconveniencies? Even in eating and drinking? many Sins are every Day committed; is it fit therefore that a Law should be made to forbid Eating and drinking? Or that publick Officers should be appointed to deliver out to every one his meat and Drink by Weight and measure? There is great Excess in Apparel, would it be reasonable therefore to forbid the wearing of any Cloaths, or to command that no Cloaths should be made but such as are absolutely necessary, and those of the Coursest Stuff, and after the plainest Fashion. And as little Reason is there to abolish a Religious Festival, which was well designed, and which is of Excellent Use to such as are piously and well dispos'd, and which, according to the Observation of it which the Church directs, is a very probable means to reclaim even those that are Vicious, and by reminding them of the mercies and Blessings of God, which otherwise they would never have thought of at all, to bring them to some Sense of Duty and Gratitude. (as little Reason, I say, is there to abolish such a Religious Festival) only because some prophane persons do, and will, take occasion to spend it in Rioting and Drunkenness, and Uncleanliness: For that they do thus spend it, whose Fault is it? Is it not their own? Does the Church, which appoints it to be observ'd, direct that it should be observ'd in this manner.

No, perhaps you'll say, that indeed she does not, she commands it to be kept in a quite different manner; but however thus, notwithstanding all the provision she has made to prevent it, it has been kept and thus (after all the Care she can take about it) probably will be kept by a great many; and therefore to cut off Occasion from such as will take Occasion, we think it had better not be kept at all, but be made again, as it once was, a Day of ordinary Work and Labour.

And do you think then, indeed, that the Abolishment of this Festival would help very much to reform the World? No such matter: For do not they that Eat to Excess at this Time, Eat as much to Excess at any other Time, when they have plenty before them of such provisions as they like? Are not they that are Drunk on the Christmase Holydays, as free to be Drunk at any other Time of the Year, when they can find Time and Money for it? Do not they that now rise up early
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in the morning to follow strong Drink, and continue until Night, 'till Wine inflame them, do the same whenever else in the Year they can get to be releas'd for a Day or two from the Labours of their calling? Are not they that now spend whole Days and Nights in excessive Gaming, to the neglect of their Business, and the wasting of their Estates, and the Impoverishment of their Families, as ready and desirous to do the same at any other Season of the Year, when they can meet with (and such as are never hard to be met with persons as idle, and as spend-thrift as themselves? Nay, do not they that spend the Christmas Holydays in Idleness and Excess, and sinful pleasures, most commonly spend all other Days dedicated to Religion after the same manner? Do not they commonly make the same use of a Fasting Day that they do of a Festival? do not they commonly spend the Lord's day itself as idly and as sinfully as they do Christmas day? It is not therefore the day that corrupts or helps to spoil the day. And therefore if in order to prevent and reform this Abuse, it be necessary, to Abolish any one day that has too customarily been thus abus'd and prophan'd, it will be necessary, for the same Reason, to abolish all other days that have been in the like manner prophan'd, or that are liable to be in the like manner abus'd: And then, that men may have no time or Leisure for their Vices, it will be necessary that they should be kept (as the *Israelites* were in the *Egyptian* Bondage) to hard and continual Labour; for if ever they are suffer'd to cease from their Burdens, they will (such of them, I mean, as are wickedly and prophanly inclin'd; they will) be employing that leisure Time in making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the Lusts therefore. Then, that none may have Time for their Vices, none must have any leisure Time from their Works for the Exercise of Religion; for the same Time that the pious and Religious do spend in the Exercise of devotion, the same will the prophane and profligate spend in the sinful Lust of the Flesh; the Consequence of which will be, that as then there will probably be less Vice and Looseness, less Rioting and drunkenness, so there will be likewise less Religion and less Devotion; for these can no more be practis'd without Time than the other. And, I doubt, the World, in the whole, would be then much worse than it is now; for it is better, that with a mixture of bad, there should be some good persons in the World, than that there should be none at all good in it; and none good there could be, if all Men were held to their Labours

Labours and their Burdens without ceasing, and without Intermission.

There is no reason therefore, I think, that any Day of Religion (no reason that this in particular) should be abolish'd, only because some people are so wicked as to turn it into a Day of Intemperance and Sensuality; because the abolishing the day would not alone serve to prevent the Wickedness that is acted upon it; it would but only put off the acting it from this day to some other day; and, in the mean Time, they that are devoutly inclin'd, would, by the days being laid aside, be depriv'd of an excellent means of Religion, and help to their Devotion; and that great Mystery of Godliness, which we now commemorate, God manifest in the Flesh, would more seldom be had in remembrance and reflected upon; and in Time to come (this Annual Mimorial of it being destroy'd and taken away) would be in danger of being quite forgotten.

Thus much I thought it reasonable to say at this Time, to justify the Wisdom and Piety of the Church, as well in still retaining the Observation of this great Festival, in memory of the Birth of the King of Heaven, as in its first Institution, and that notwithstanding the ill use that the prophane and Licentious have made, and, 'tis likely, will still make of it.

But nothing can be said to justify their wicked Abuse of it; for, *W unto them*, says the Prophet in the Text, *that rise up early in the Morning that they may follow strong Drink, that continue until Night till Wine inflame them. And the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine are in their Feasts, but they regard not the Work of the Lord, neither consider the Operation of his Hands.*

The proper Application of which Words, to the great Festival that we at this Time celebrate, will be, I suppose by shewing, *First*, What that Work of the Lord is which we ought at this Time to have regard to, and to exercise our Meditations upon; *Secondly*, What Thoughts and Affections towards God, the Consideration thereof is proper to work in us, and what Influence it ought to have upon our Lives; And, *Thirdly*, lastly, How very unsuitable to the Occasion of our present Joy and Thanksgiving, the Custom is, of those prophane and licentious persons, who spend this Time in Rioting and Drunkenness, and other sinful Lusts of the Flesh; of all which very briefly.

I. Then I shall briefly shew, what that Work of the Lord is, which we ought at this time to have a special regard to,

to, and to exercise our meditations upon. And this has been often already intimated : That Work of God which we are now more especially to consider, is his sending (as at this time) his own Son into the World, for the Redemption of mankind, And here we should do well to consider more Particularly.-----

I. The Greatness and Dignity of the Person that was sent the only begotten Son of God ; He who was *the Brightness of the Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person ; upholding all things by the Word of his Power ; that Eternal λόγος, of whom St. John speaking, says, In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ; the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.* The Sense of which is very well express'd in the Creed commonly call'd the Nicene Creed, wherein declaring our Belief of this Article, we are taught to say, *I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all Worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one Substance with the Father, and by whom all things were made:* Such was the Person whose coming into the World we at this time commemorate.

II. Another thing proper to be now consider'd by us, is the manner of his being sent ; That he came not *in the Glory of his Father, with the holy Angels*, as he will come hereafter, when he shall return to judge the World ; nay, that he came not with so much Glory as the Angels of Light had been used to appear in, when they were sent by on some message to men ; but *he emptied himself*, as the Apostle expresses it, *Phil. ii. 7. ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν* ; he laid aside his majesty and Glory ; he divested himself for a while (not indeed of his Eternal Godhead, for that could not be, but) of the Glory which he had with his Father before all Worlds, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of Men, He whom the Heavens and the Heaven of Heavens could not contain, condescended, by assuming the Humane Nature, the Soul and Body of man to himself, to be (as it were) Circumscribed and limited within the same narrow Bounds that we are ; *The Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us* : And neither was his dwelling among us after the manner of earthly Kings and Princes with State and magnificence, in Splendor and Plenty ; but, he appear'd among us as one of the meanest of men, as the Son

Son of a Carpenter, of a man who earn'd his Living by his Labour; with whom also, until the time that he began to preach (which was not till he was about Thirty Years old) he is generally believ'd to have work'd at the same Trade. Neither after that, was his way of Living advanc'd; for he had than no House of his own to lay his Head in, no Estate of his own to live upon, but was for the most part maintain'd by Charity and Contribution. Was ever such Condescension before heard of; Or could it enter into the Heart of Man that such a thing could be; Great indeed, might the Apostle well say, *is this Mystery of Godliness, God manifested in the Flesh.* But—

III. Another thing proper to exercise our Meditation upon at this Season, is the End and design of this Incarnation of the Son of God; which, in general, was the Redemption of Mankind from that wretched, deplorable and desperate State, which by Sin they had plung'd themselves into. *For this purpose, saith the Apostle. The Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil, 1 John iii. 8.* And God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life. *For God sent not his son into the World to condemn the World but that the World thro' him might be saved;* so we are told by our Saviour himself, *John iii. 16, 17.* This was the gracious Design of God and our Saviour in this wonderful and Mysterious Undertaking; to make peace for us, and to preach Peace to us; to reconcile us to God, and to save us from our Sins, and to redeem our Souls from Destruction.

In order to which, and as a means of accomplishing, which gracious Design; (and that's another thing proper to be now consider'd, and meditated upon)

IV. He not only took upon him our Nature, in that to converse freely and familiarly with us, and to teach us both by his Precepts and by his Example the way we were to take to be happy; but in this Nature united to the Divinity, he pay'd the Price of our Redemption, he gave his Life a Ransom for all; *For in him (as the Apostle says) we have Redemption through his Blood, even the Forgiveness of Sins, Col. i. 14.* And this indeed seems to have been the main design of his coming; the chief Reason for which it was necessary that he should become Man. For the same Precepts and Rules of Holy Living might have been given by an Angel, or even by a meer Man inspired by God, and furnish'd with Power sufficient to prove his Divine Mission,

Mission, beyond all Contradiction; and the same excellent Example which he gave, was not, I suppose, impossible to have been given by another man, assisted and strengthen'd unto all Good by the powerful Operation of the Holy Ghost: But to redeem lost mankind, to satisfy the Justice of God, to make Peace between God and men; that was what could not be done either by Angels or men; that was what none could do but the Son of God; none but *He* could pay the Price of so large a Purchase, for no Creature's suffering could have been equivalent to the Destruction of the whole Race of mankind, which was thereby to be bought of. For this purpose therefore the Son of God assum'd our Nature, that, an inestimable Value being added to his suffering as a man by the Union of the divine Nature with the Human, he might *by one Oblation of himself once offered, make a full, perfect, and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World* This was what he came to do; this was what by his Incarnation, *i. e.* by his being manifested in the Flesh, he was capacitated to do; this was what he actually did do for us: *For (as the Apostle says) being found in fashion as a man, he Humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the Death of the Cross, Phil. ii. 8.* And this is that wonderful Work of God which we ought, now especially, to regard; this is that Operation of his hands, which the present Festival calls upon us to consider.

But more meditation or Contemplation only is not a sufficient Commemoration of this great mystery; unless we make it as useful and practical to our selves as we can. This therefore was the next thing I propounded to do, *viz.*

2. To shew, what Thoughts and Affection towards God the Consideration of these things should work in us, and what Influence it ought to have upon our Lives.

I. What Thoughts and Affections of mind towards God the Consideration of these things should work in us.

And the natural return for Love is Love: If therefore God so loved the World as to give his only begotten Son, to take upon him the Human Nature, in that to pass a wretched and painful life, and to die an accursed death for their Redemption, how can we chuse but love him again, and devote our selves, Souls and Bodies intirely to his faithful Service? For *this (as the Apostle says) is the Love of God, that we keep his commandments;* we can testify and make Proof of our Love to God no other way. This therefore—

II. Is the Influence which the Consideration of that great mystery of Godliness, which we now commemorate, should have upon our Lives; we should look upon our selves as the Redeemed of the Lord, and not live any longer to our selves, but unto him that died for us; being *bought with a Price*, and that *not with corruptible things as Silver and Gold, but with the precious Blood of the Son of God*, made man, we should assert our Freedom from the Slavery of Sin and the devil, and glorifie God, both in our Body and in our Spirit, which are his.

And this leads me to the third and last thing which I propounded to do, and wherewith I design to put an end to this discourse, *viz.*

3. To shew how very unsuitable to the occasion of our present Joy and Thansgiving, the Custom is of those prophane and licentious Persons, who spend this time in Rioting and drunkenness, and other sinful Lusts of the Flesh. For the mystery we now commemorate is the Birth of the Son of God, *who was manifested for this purpose, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil*: Can any thing then be more absurd, then that we should spend the time of this holy Festival in the practice of those Wicked Works which he came to destroy? The Blessing we now pretend to thank God for, is our Redemption from the Power of Sin, and the Dominion of darkness: Can any thing be more contradictory to this pretence, than now at this very time to sell our selves again to that Slavery from which we seem to Rejoyce that we were redeem'd? *He gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar People zealous of good Works*: Is it not then a very unsuitable way of commemorating this Benefit, that Iniquity should abound now, rather more than at other times? And that our Love to God, and Zeal for his Service, should now be more cold, when it ought to be most flaming and operative? Is it not very absurd, that at this very Season set apart on purpose to Commemorate our Lord's Birth, and in the doing of which we pretend to be at this time emply'd, we should so far forget, or so little consider, what was the design of his Coming, as to live and act in the greatest possible Contradiction thereto; not only making this Festival an Occasion and Opertunity, but seeming likewise to think it an Excuse or Justification of our allowing our selves in Irregularities and Extravagances of Life and Behaviour, as we our selves should be asham'd of at any other time?

That

That this is the manner of a great many People's keeping Christmas I'm sure I shall not need to tell you; But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation. I hope you do, and I pray God we all of us may, so regard the Work of the Lord, so seriously consider and reflect upon the Design of our Saviour's first coming, as to keep this Feast in remembrance thereof in a manner agreeable to the occasion of it, and likewise to order our whole Lives conformably thereunto, that so at his second coming to judge the World, we may be found an acceptable People in his sight, through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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ADVERTISEMENT,

SEven Sermons Preach'd by *Ofspring Blackhall D. D.* Now Lord Bishop of *Exeter.* 1. *The Blessedness of the Poor in Spirit* before the Queen. 2. *St. Paul and St. James Reconcil'd* at Cambridge before the University. 3. The 30 of January 1698. at *St. Margarets Westminster* 4. *The Subjects Duty*, at *St. dunstan* in the *West* March the 8 1704. 5. A visitation at *Brentwood*, before the Lord Bishop of *London.* 6. *The way of Trying Prophets* before the Queen. 7. On the great Storm at *St. Pauls* January. the 19: 1703. Likewise the eight of *Esquire Boyl's Lectures* at *St. Paul.*